

Four Corners Air Quality Task Force Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the Four Corners Air Quality Task Force?

The Four Corners Air Quality Task Force (4CAQTF) is a broadly representative group formed to look at air quality issues in the Four Corners region.

Who convened and manages the Task Force?

The states of New Mexico and Colorado convened the Task Force in November 2005, and will oversee the work of the Task Force through its completion in December 2007.

What other agencies are involved?

Other participating agencies include the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency; the Southern Ute Indian Tribe's Air Quality Department; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service; the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service; the U.S. Department of Energy; and the state of Utah.

Why does the Four Corners area need a Task Force such as this?

Increased development in the area including new power plants, oil and gas wells, and population growth are all contributing to air quality concerns. Ozone levels in the region are close to exceeding the health-based national standards for outdoor air. Many residents are concerned with potential health impacts from other pollutants. An overall haze and plumes of nitrogen oxides can often be seen in the skies, which impact visibility. There are concerns for the ecosystem due to deposition of mercury and nitrogen.

The responsible regulatory agencies will need to address these issues in order to effectively manage air quality. These agencies believe the input of the residents of the area is important in developing an effective management plan.

What is the purpose of the Task Force?

The purpose of the Task Force is to bring together a diverse group of interested parties to learn about and discuss air quality issues in the Four Corners area. The Task Force will develop a broad list of options for improving air quality in the area that will aid the regulatory agencies in developing plans for managing air quality impacts.

Who may participate in the Task Force?

Anyone with an interest in air quality issues in the Four Corners region is invited to participate. Please see the Join the Task Force page on the website to learn more about how to join the Task Force.

Who is currently involved?

In addition to the agencies mentioned above, Task Force membership includes community members, interest groups, local governments, industry, and other interested entities. See the Rosters page on the website for a current list.

As a Task Force participant, how will my input be considered and incorporated?

Participants in the 4CAQTF process can provide written input at any time, using task force procedures, including drafting entirely new mitigation ideas. All such written input will be incorporated in the final report for consideration by the regulatory agencies.

In addition to this on-going input, a public review process will take place for three weeks in June-July 2007. This will be a web-based process that will allow anyone to review and comment on the Draft Task Force Report. To announce the review process, an email will be sent to all those who have attended any of the Task Force meetings to date. Additionally, news advisories on this to all local media will be distributed.

All comments made in this process will be public, and will include the commenter's name and affiliation. There will be no official response to comments since the comments are directed to the Task Force members as the authors of the Draft Report, not to the coordinating agencies. Task Force work groups will review comments specific to their sections at the August 2007 quarterly Task Force meeting, and will decide what revisions, if any, to make. All comments will be appended to the Final Task Force Report.

How often does the Task Force meet?

The Task Force meets quarterly in the Four Corners area (usually Farmington or Durango) in the months of February, May, August and November. All meeting information is available on the website on the Meetings page.

What are the Task Force Work Groups and what is their purpose?

Anyone may participate in any work group at any time. Most work groups have monthly conference calls, and meet face-to-face at quarterly Task Force meetings. The Task Force has three "source" work groups: Power Plants, Oil and Gas, and Other Sources. The purpose of these groups is to provide education, discuss mitigation options, receive input, and coordinate the development of the mitigation options relating to those sectors. The Cumulative Effects and Monitoring work groups coordinate existing data and analyses that could inform the work of the Task Force, as well as identify additional air quality analyses and monitoring that may be helpful to the responsible agencies in prioritizing mitigation options to implement and in developing any air quality management plans.

What is the Four Corners Inventory and Modeling Project?

The agencies that are coordinating the Task Force are also working together on an inventory and modeling project for the Four Corners area. Prior to convening the Task Force, the agencies identified the need for a more site specific inventory of the Four Corners as well as more robust modeling of mitigation scenarios. When the Task Force came together and the Cumulative Effects work group started, that group developed a way for this work to get accomplished. In order that the Task Force's Cumulative Effects work group could continue its work for the Task Force and complete it in the Task Force timeframe (Dec 2007), the agencies split the longer-term inventory and modeling project out for management by the agencies through an ad hoc committee made up of interested stakeholders. The results of this project will be used by the

regulatory agencies to identify the most effective mitigation strategies and groups of strategies for implementation in the Four Corners area.

What is the difference between the Cumulative Effects Work Group and the Ad Hoc Committee working on the Inventory and Modeling Project?

The Cumulative Effects (CE) work group assists the source sector work groups (e.g., Oil & Gas, Other Sources and Power Plants) with some quantification of emissions reductions from certain mitigation options. The CE group relies on existing emission inventory information for their work, specifically the emissions inventory commissioned by the Western Regional Air Partnership (WRAP), the San Juan and Rio Arriba Counties inventories commissioned by the State of New Mexico, and the Southern Ute emission inventory. The CE work group's work products will be completed for inclusion in the Task Force Report by December 2007. The Ad Hoc Committee is working on the longer term effort of modeling several mitigation scenarios in the Four Corners to ascertain what mitigation strategies, both individually and cumulatively, will be the most effective. This group will also use existing emissions inventories, but will contract for them to be revised into a form specific to the Four Corners region and suitable for use in an air quality model. The results of this modeling project will be used by the agencies after the Task Force Report is complete, and will not be a part of the Task Force Report.

How long will the Task Force be in existence?

The Task Force will work for a two-year period, making its final report available by December 2007. The Task Force will be invited to convene periodically in the future to receive updates and provide additional input.

What will the end result of the Task Force be?

The final product will be a report, published on the Task Force website, of all of the potential mitigation options developed by Task Force members. This document will serve as a resource and a guide to the regulatory agencies in developing air quality management plans. The report is in progress right now, and a draft of it is available on the Task Force Report page of the website.

How will the Task Force benefit the region?

The work of the Task Force will provide an invaluable resource to the agencies responsible for air quality management in the Four Corners region. Further, the Task Force provides a forum for learning, the exchange of ideas and information, and a venue to get to know the people in the area with interest in air quality.

How long will it take to implement the Task Force's Report?

The Task Force Report as such will not be implemented. Rather, the Report represents a compendium of options for mitigating air quality impacts. The responsible agencies may use the Report as the basis for developing air quality management plans in the region. This may include developing new and revising existing regulations, supporting new legislation, developing new outreach and information programs, and developing and/or expanding voluntary programs for emission reductions.

When the Task Force Report is complete, what will happen next?

When the Task Force Report is final, the regulatory agencies will meet to review the options and begin the development of an implementation plan. This work will be done cooperatively among the agencies when appropriate, and individually as needed. Some of the work will include additional analyses of some of the options including modeling, economic analyses, review of additional monitoring data, etc. For example, implementation of a voluntary program could take up to six months, whereas the development of a new regulation could take a year or longer. The Task Force will be reconvened periodically to receive updates on progress and to provide additional input.

Whom may I contact with additional questions not addressed here?

If you have questions about the work of the task force, please contact Mark Jones of the New Mexico Environment Department at (505) 327-6854. You may also contact Christopher Dann of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment at (303) 692-3281.

Thank you for your interest!